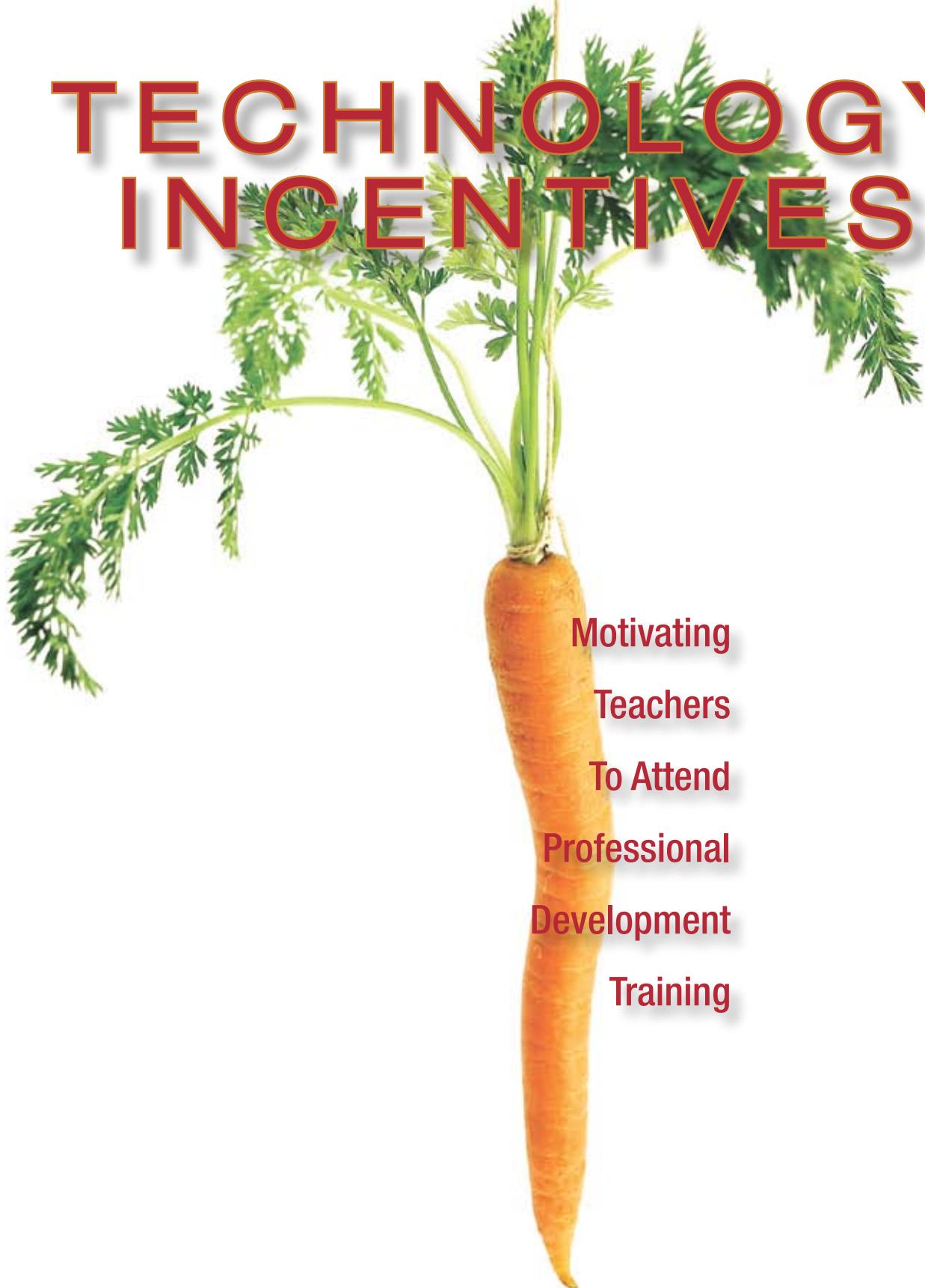


TECHNOLOGY INCENTIVES



BY VIRGINIA RICHARD

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It's Christmas in most Polk County Schools in Florida every month!

Technology incentives are a great way to motivate teachers to learn to use technology, and Polk County School District has proven that it works. When teachers attend classes to learn to use the incentive they will be given, you can bet they will continue after the class is over.

To make it happen, you must first sell teachers the dream and get buy-in. Districts must also make sure peer coaching and mentoring are in place so teachers will have support and follow-up technical assistance after the training. Selected school peer mentors and coaches can become your marketing experts to advertise the use of and sell teachers on the dream of using technology. Another win-win is to provide access, as sufficient technology excites both teachers and students. Administrators must also embrace and encourage the use of technology in the curriculum to inspire 21st century teachers. The administrator must envision, develop, and implement a technology plan that clearly delineates the goals and action steps required to provide technology professional development. On top of that, everyone must schedule time to collaborate often with the school technology team for the plan to become a reality. Finally, incentives should be the bait to hook them one and all.

Tech Coaches Can Earn Incentives

A highlight that motivates Polk County teachers is that a technology coaching program is in place to assist teachers at different schools. Once teachers attend the training, the technology or software is provided to use in the classroom immediately. Using a new tool requires discipline and practice. Students who have attended training are the keys to helping teachers increase the use of any new technology. Teachers who are open to learning through this approach usually find

that their students can coach others during instruction. Innovative teachers find this frees them to become more active facilitators.

Districts that apply this approach can be assured they will inspire teachers to learn and apply new technologies. Most important, the result will be engagement of all students in the learning process. Research has shown students who are engaged exhibit increased achievement.

Key Groups Market Tech Training

Marketing can be a motivating factor for districts to sell the technology professional development to teachers.

School Technology Services, a department within Polk County School District's Information Systems and Technology Division, runs an extensive professional development program for five key technology members for each school. Called Five Star Groups, these key members are model technology teachers, administrators, instructional television (ITV) specialists, media specialists, and network managers. These members use technology frequently and can answer questions teachers may have after training. Peer coaches also help maintain the use of technology with new users while using it during classroom instruction. Teachers will want what other teachers have, and this group should be continually learning and sharing how they are using new technologies to lure in reluctant teachers.

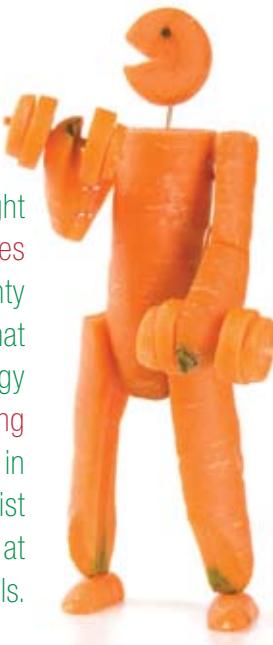
To motivate the Five Star Groups, School Technology Services asks for input on what tools they are currently using to enhance student achievement. Whatever the choices are, all teachers want to earn incentives to obtain new technologies. Polk's Technology Proficiency Program and media technology proficiencies Web sites market the information about all teacher, administrator, network manager, and ITV technology profi-

ciency levels available in Polk County Schools. The incentives are listed at the bottom of the site for each proficiency level. Even though Web sites are used to disseminate this information, word of mouth through peer coaches selected at the beginning of the professional development is your best advertisement.

Training Must Meet All Teachers' Needs

Structuring the professional development according to skill level is another incentive for teachers to attend training. Conducting a needs assessment is the best way to find the skill level of the teachers. Polk County's School Technology Services is fortunate, as

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the State Bureau of Instruction and Innovation developed an Inventory of Teacher Technology Skills (ITTS) aligned with ISTE's National Education Technology Standards. The inventory determines the basic technology skill level of each teacher and can be administered at the school level by the network manager. It can also be conducted by any other individual who has been trained by the Five Star Groups in each school. These groups can serve many roles, if they are present in schools on a day-to-day basis.

Providing incentives to the Five Star Groups on a yearly basis is essential as motivation to keep the program stable and moving forward. Teachers who need training may earn technology proficiency levels I and II by passing the ITTS with an 80% score or higher on all six sections. Once teachers pass the inventory, they earn a 1 GB flash drive and are excited about the next step. The next level—technology proficiency III—focuses on technology integration, and teachers take classes online that have been developed by vendors or other teachers and district technology specialists. Other required courses relate to state-adopted text, research, copyright and ethics, Internet safety, and other multimedia such as streaming video.

Motivating Students and Teachers

A unique situation in Polk County is the Instructional Television program. Polk County has succeeded in this area, especially with our instructional television specialists in schools. The ITV program is run by both teachers and students, and the ITV professional development training is structured so that students and teachers continue to learn from each other. By attending training, teachers may earn digital cameras, different types of digital video editing software, LCD projectors, and a host of other tools to use in the school's instructional television studio.

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Teachers and students participating in the ITV program may gain extra incentives by participating in the annual Video Awards Ceremony. Judges throughout the country determine which school submits the best video in a host of categories. This is a great way for teachers to showcase student work and the skills learned from the professional development training.

Incentives Provide Access

Access, access, and more access is another incentive to encourage training. When teachers know they will be able to keep the tool they are learning, it effectively motivates them to attend. As most schools and teachers find it difficult to keep up with the demand for adequate technology resources, earning them is a great way to motivate teachers. Districts can also provide teachers an opportunity to choose the tool they like best and want to use in their classroom. Polk County found early on that the choices of incentives should be limited. School Technology Services only purchases tools that have been approved to work on the district's network. The district also found that tools are used much more effectively when one of the peer coaches has been trained at the school. This process ensures that teachers will have a local coach to collaborate and continue to follow up as the need arises.

Different Incentives Draw Teachers

Types of incentives are extremely important! Polk's School Technology Services found that providing the same incentive for each proficiency level promotes equity among all teachers and students. Although the department hasn't even scratched the surface to reach all 7,000 teachers, Polk's Five Star Groups and others have earned approximately 3,000 incentives, including scanners, digital cameras, flash drives, LCD projectors, laptops, scan converters, micro testers,

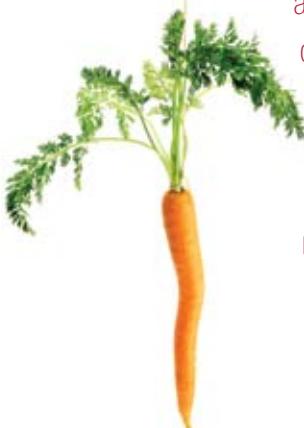
digitizing tablets, and Palm Pilots. Due to teachers earning these incentives in the past, more teachers are eager to earn some of the incentives being advertised for the upcoming school year.

The district applies for many grants to fund the incentives. The U.S. Department of Education runs an excellent Web site for grant opportunities. Other sources include private businesses such as Hewlett Packard, Best Buy, Target, Bright House Networks, and Water Management Districts in Florida. If schools do not have the funds to provide incentives, grants would be a perfect avenue to pursue money to do so.

Input from teachers about technologies that are relevant to state adopted curriculums for the district are good choices for incentives. A clear plan of how teachers can earn the incentives should be posted to a Web site, and brochures circulated periodically to remind teachers of their goal. Instructional technology and instructional departments or divisions working together on this venture make the process easier for teachers. Polk has found that redundant classes are curtailed when two divisions work together. Working together to pool funds between divisions may also increase the amount of incentives available for teachers. Teachers like it when the professional development is organized and easy to complete.

Administrative Support Is Crucial

Administrative support and buy-in are crucial to encourage teachers. Administrators must model and promote the use of technology to motivate teachers with the message that it is important. Administrators who communicate and collaborate with staff members about technology goals and school improvement plans can set the tone for reluctant as well as frequent users of technology. Districts must also make sure administrators attend



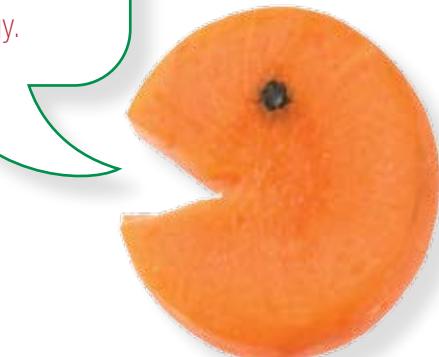
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technology professional development to keep them abreast of appropriate uses in the classroom. Incentives for administrators motivate them as well to continue using new technologies. Polk developed a proficiency level tied to incentives for administrators and has succeeded here as well. The latest administrator technology incentive was a tablet PC, and professional development training was tied with it.

District Support Is a Great Incentive

Support from the district to schools is a large incentive in itself. Schools must know they will be supported in their efforts to integrate technology. Polk County Information Systems and Technology Division has four technology teams that meet annually with each school in the district. During this time, members discuss how they can better help schools meet technology goals set for the year. School administrators have raved about the success of this mission, as it puts a name with a face and keeps many issues and projects from falling through the cracks. Districts can empower schools by setting an example of technology team interaction.

Driving professional development with incentives can be very positive. There will be challenges in any program, but it is worth the effort. Educators cannot continue to make excuses for little or no use of technology in classrooms. Schools can acquire grants and other creative funding to buy these technology tools. School Technology Services in Polk County Schools has taken the plunge, and it is working! It can work for any district



that creates a Five Star Group or cadre of teachers who are innovative enough to help make it happen. Administrator buy-in and district support are necessary to support stakeholders as they commit to the challenge. Support, support, and more support is a must. Motivating teachers through incentives they learn how to use is encouraging in this district. Districts must find ways to obtain technology incentives and challenge their teachers to become 21st century educators.

Resources

Florida State Bureau of Instruction and Innovation Inventory of Teacher Technology Skills: <http://www.flstar.org/info/indicators.htm>
Polk County Schools' Instructional Television Program: <http://www.polk-fl.net/itv/>
Polk's Media Technology Proficiencies: <http://www.polk-fl.net/load.asp?page=/ist/>
Polk's Technology Proficiency Program: http://www.polk-fl.net/schooltech/Training/Teach_Cert/THCover.htm
U.S. Dept. of Education grant sources: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/technology/edgrants.html>



Virginia Richard has been with the Polk County School System for nine years. She taught elementary education for five years and is now a teacher resource specialist trainer in School Technology Services, a department within the Information Systems and Technology Division. She has presented at the local, state, and national levels on technology integration and online learning.

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